

Darrel W. Stubbs

History



Brigham Young University School of Music
Professor of Oboe, Chamber Music, and Theory 1962-90
Interview September 15, 2008

Education:

BM, University of Rochester, 1949

MM, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1952

DMA, University of Southern California, 1966

Interview with Mike Ohman- September 15, 2008

Please review your education. Then tell how you came to BYU.

I was born and reared in Provo, Utah. I started playing the trumpet in the first grade because I had a good friend who played that instrument, and he talked me in to it. Also, at the old Franklin School, I once heard trumpet being played, very well. I stopped and listened a few minutes, thinking how great it sounded. I ran back into the building and up the stairs, and there was Jay De Graff, playing *The Carnival of Venice*, with his sister accompanying him on the piano. I had to have trumpet.

These were depression days, when nobody had any money. I went home and told my mom I had to have a trumpet. She said, "We don't have any money."

I said, "Well, I'll get some money. I'll deliver newspapers or something." And that's what happened. What I bought turned out to be a Tonk Bros. Trumpet. It didn't have a case, so eventually I went to a shop in Salt Lake City and found a case for it. Now I was all set to go.

I played trumpet all the way through elementary school. When I went to Dixon Junior High School, I was late to band practice, and there was a whole row of trumpet players, about seventeen of them. Farrell Madsen, the band director, said to me, "Hey, any of you trumpet players who might be interested in playing baritone horn, the fingering is the same. It won't be any trouble at all. Raise your hands."

I was the first to raise my hand. So I left the trumpet for the baritone horn in seventh grade.

I loved that instrument and became very proficient on it. Mr. Madsen asked me if I would like to play a solo in the last solo ensemble contest sponsored by the National Association in Ogden, in 1941. I said, "Sure, I'd like to do that." And I did.

I got the first division medal, and I thought that was as far as you could go. I didn't think you could get any better than that.

When I went to Provo High School, I went in to Wesley Pearce, the band director, and asked, "Where is my baritone horn?"

He and my older sister had secretly conspired that I would not continue on in baritone horn, but I didn't know that. My sister was a violinist, the band director's concert mistress. The director added, "I would like to talk to you tonight after school."

I went in to see him, and bless his heart—I'll *never* be able to thank him enough for what he wanted to do. But I didn't want to do it. He said, in essence, "There's no future on baritone horn. You'll play a concert here and there, and that's all there is. You'll need to switch to an instrument that's in line with the classical tradition"—words to that effect.

I asked, "What do you have in mind?"

He said, "Either oboe or bassoon."

At Dixon Junior High School, I had heard an oboe played so badly, for so long, that I didn't want to play oboe. Nobody could talk me into it. He didn't know that, so he tried everything to get me to play oboe. But I told him, "No, I just can't bring myself to do that."

He suggested, "Well, come back tomorrow night, and let me have another chance to persuade you."

Pearce was a great teacher, and he knew what he was doing. He thought that maybe playing some recordings for me would help, and they did a little. He came with a whole stack of 78 rpm records. He played me Brahms *First Symphony*, Dvorak, a Beethoven symphony, and other works. After an hour and a half, or two hours, he asked me, "Well, what do you think?"

I said, "No."

He was very disappointed. "Well, what are you going to do?" he asked me.

"I'm going to go out for football."

He said, "Stubbs, you're too small to play football. You'll get hurt."

I gave a typical teenager answer: "I run too fast. They can't catch me. How can they hurt me?" I was a fast runner.

I did go out for football, and in the very first game of the season, nobody caught me; I caught them. I blocked two men out, and they both landed on my shoulder. I heard and felt my clavicle snap. So my football career began and ended all in one game. By the time I healed, the football season would be over.

The band played an evening concert shortly thereafter, and I was sick that I was not a member of it. The very next week, I meekly walked back in the door and said, "If you'll

have me, I'm going to try oboe." That's how I began my career.

I started playing the oboe in the tenth grade at Provo High School. While I was still a high school student, I played oboe in the BYU symphony orchestra under LeRoy Robertson and Lawrence Sardoni. I started out taking a few lessons from Louis W. Booth, the oboist at BYU and the first oboe teacher BYU ever had. He was a fine oboist, and I learned a lot from him, even by just listening to him play.

I had my heart set on the Eastman School of Music. I went in the army air corps right out of high school, but the Battle of the Bulge had just been fought, and everybody was put in the infantry. I went through infantry basic training, during which I fired "expert" on the rifle. My MOS (military occupational specialty) number was changed from infantryman to sniper.

I went overseas, not thinking much about it—after all, I was just a teenager. I was shipped to a replacement depot close to Naples, Italy in December 1944. All through the winter of 1944-45 we were put through strenuous training—25-mile hikes, which we had to make in so much time, with full field equipment. In the spring, we were shipped to a city up by Pisa, near Florence. About the middle of the month of April, 1945, I went into Florence and heard a band playing. Again, I felt sick that I wasn't playing.

I went down after the concert and talked to the oboe player and told him I played oboe.

He said, "You do?! What are you doing now?"

When I told him, he said, "If you're interested in playing oboe, you might come and replace me. I'm leaving."

At that moment, I said, "I'd be delighted."

He said, "Go talk to that man, Warrant Officer Frost" who was the director.

I did. He looked at me kind of askance and asked a few questions: "Have you ever heard of Marcel Tabuteau?"

"I certainly have."

"Tell me about him."

So I told him about Tabuteau. Then he knew I was an oboist. He said, "You've got it. This is what you do."

I sat down and wrote down what he told me to do. He added, "Take this and go see that man tomorrow, and if he says yes, you come back and see me."

The man said yes, and I did come back and see the oboist. So in late April, I went from the infantry to a bandsman, in the 364th Army Service Forces Band. We were in the Po River Valley at that time, and the Germans were up on top of the mountain range. It was like playing king's X in the wintertime. Nobody could do anything. So we just took time out.



Then when the military decided to go fight, both sides had to go. That happened on the 3rd day of May 1945. I was in the band and not thinking about anything that happened. We were going up in the Appenine Mountains to play a concert. We'd just made it back, and the war began the next day. I didn't know what happened to my regiment until 1980.

In the Utah symphony, when a symphony went into a city to play, we went to eat, then came back to the hotel and changed, played a concert, and came back to the hotel. Then we could go sightseeing a few blocks, go to bed, get up and leave.

We did that so much that I said, "I would like to back to Europe someday and actually *see* Europe." That's what we did. Eva and I rented a car.

We drove from the English Channel, on the north of France, all over France and came down to Italy. We looked around northern Italy.

I wanted to go to Naples, which we did. (From Naples we went over to Brendisi where you could put your car on a boat and go over to Greece.) In the process, we left Florence. I had wanted to see the Da Vinci Palace, but it was closed. When I was eighteen years old, I had walked around it, saying, "Oh, yeah," but now as a doctoral candidate, I'd have given anything for the opportunity to go inside.

From Florence, we went south, and one of the scenes I recognized immediately was a cemetery at whose dedication I had newly played in the 365ASF band. We drove up to the gate, and I went in while my wife Eva waited for me. I don't remember how long I was gone, but at the first turn, I saw a statue of a man carrying a rifle, and the number of my old army battalion, which I think was the 365th. That was one of the most shocking experiences of my life. The outfit I had been in, *just* before I joined the band, was almost

totally destroyed, and I likely would have been one of those casualties.

I'd never given it any thought since 1945—and thirty-five years had passed. I felt awful. I couldn't reconcile myself to what I had missed. So I remained in the cemetery a long time. That wartime experience doesn't have much to do with music, but it tells about me, and I guess that's what this interview is all about.

The war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945. The oboe player I had replaced was going to get to go home in about two weeks. Yet I beat him home, because when the war ended, all the people who were unassigned were sent home, to be taken to the Pacific war.

I went home on furlough, then came back to Camp Lee, Virginia, the band camp. I was in Bushnell General Hospital, in Brigham City, Utah (with an ear problem), when the war of 1945 in the Pacific ended, in early August.

I dated Eva while I was at Bushnell. She was going to BYU and played flute in the orchestra. Eva is an identical twin, and the twins and a friend of mine from high school were the flute players. I asked my friend about the good looking twins, saying, "I'd like to meet them." Afterwards, she introduced us. Somewhere during that time, the orchestra was playing Brahms' *Second Symphony*. The third movement has an oboe solo. Louis asked, "Would you like to play it?"

I said, "Sure." So I sat down and played it. Here I was, and Eva was right next to me, or at least close by. That was our official meeting. Then we married and lived happily ever after—sixty-two years. We married in the Logan Temple on July 26, 1946.

Eva: We were actually engaged the week before Darrel was discharged.

Darrel: I had already made up my mind to go to Eastman, and it was already near the end of July. I didn't make it that year, so I stayed at BYU for two quarters. I worked during a spring term, made application, and entered Eastman in 1947.

We spent two years at Eastman. I got my bachelor's degree in performance in two years and a summer school. I was given extra credit for my performances. So I was lucky. Our oldest son was born in April 1949, and somehow I had to have a job. I was the top oboist; a really fine oboist had graduated the year before.

I knew that I had to graduate and get a job. In about March 1949, I put my oboe in its case and hit the academic side of the degree, in order to finish up. But before I put the oboe away, Sprankle had got a letter from a former student at Eastman, who was conducting the Oklahoma City Symphony. "I need a first oboe player," he had written. "Would you recommend one?"

Sprankle recommended me. I communicated briefly with Oklahoma City, and the contract was supposedly signed, sealed and delivered. Then I got a telegram in about the middle of May: "We are sorry. The anticipated oboe vacancy did not occur." The musicians union would not let the orchestra fire the oboe player, and they were kind enough to let me know that.

Needing a job, I went to the placement director at Eastman and asked, "What am I going to do?"

I was told, "There's only one thing to do. Play for Wilfred C. Bain, the dean of the Indiana University School of Music. He's going to be here tomorrow."

I was frantic. So I went home that night and started to make a reed, playing and trying to get back in shape. I spent most of the night

doing that, so didn't get any sleep. I wore my embouchure out, and I didn't have a very good reed. I knew the audition was futile; and afterwards, I knew I'd played badly. I didn't think I had the slightest chance of his choosing me.

It's interesting how fate steps in the door. After Bain finished the auditions, he called Robert Sprinkle, the oboe teacher, to thank him for the use of his studio. Sprinkle asked, "Whom did you choose?"

"I chose Robert Lehrfeld."

Sprinkle said, "Well, he's a good oboe player, but I think you chose the wrong man."

"Whom do you think I should have chosen?"

"Darrel Stubbs is the man you need to teach oboe. He's a fine player. He just couldn't demonstrate that today."

Then he explained all the things I've just explained.

Dean Bain said, "I've already told Lehrfeld that he has the job."

Sprinkle continued, "If you want me to call him and tell him, I will."

We two were both graduating, and that would be the end of the relationship anyway.

I don't remember all the intricacies, but Wilfred C. Bain, the dean, called Lehrfeld and apologized profusely, explaining why: "Mr. Sprinkle suggested very strongly that I go with Darrell Stubbs."

So I got the job at Indiana University in the fall of 1949. I stayed at Indiana for six years. Indiana is one of the finest schools of music in the country, but Bain was following a procedure that became apparent to several of us newly hired people. He would hire an

applicant, keep him for seven years, and then just before they were to get tenure, he would replace them. After being there five years, I discovered that, and I wasn't about to be victimized. So I wrote a letter of resignation, explaining why I was leaving. He assured me that that would not have happened, but I put him in a bad place, because I had sent a copy of the letter to the president of the university. I might have caused Bain some problems, but it was obvious that that was what he was doing. The president may or may not have known that.



I did get my master's degree at Indiana before I left, so I'd been full-time faculty and was going to school on the side.

We used to come out west every summer, and that year, we tried to find a job. We didn't succeed. I had made some good contacts with USAC (Utah State Agriculture College, now Utah State University) in Logan, and had met a lot of fine people. One of these was Clarence Sawhill, the band director at UCLA. I hadn't been able to find a job, so I called

Sawhill and asked him, "If you hear of anything, please let me know."

He said, "I'll sure do that."

In late August or so he called and said, "Darrell, I've just learned that the band director-ship at the University of Hawaii is vacant. Are you interested?"

I said, "I'll take it."

We packed our car completely full and put it on the boat, and then we *had* to go. We flew to Hawaii. It was the first week of school, so the year had already started. When I walked in the front door, the department chairman said, "Here's the text. There's the classroom. Good luck!" In essence, that's what he said.

The class was huge, kind of like a 101 class would be at BYU. The students had to learn the rudiments of music, the elementary portions of it. The instrument of choice in Hawaii was the ukulele, which I'd never played in my life. So I made a complete confession to the students. Then I thought I might be able to kill some time by calling roll, but the names were a challenge. The first name was a Japanese name, the longest and most complicated name one could imagine. I said the first name, and then looked, and looked, and looked. Finally he yelled at me the name, and that was the beginning. I also had lots of Polynesian names. But those kids were absolutely delightful. I told them, "I don't know *any* of this. I don't even know how to *teach* it."

They said, "We'll teach you."

"Great." And they did. They taught me after the first class how to play the ukulele. I went home and practiced it and read the book. Within a week's time, I was somewhat independent of the students, and my teaching went on from there. Still, on arrival, I had said, "What am I doing here?!" At least it was a job.

They turned out to be great people, all very cooperative.

I met the band with Norman Rian, a fine man, actually a vocalist, a choir director. He said to me, "I think there are probably only three or four students enrolled for band." The university didn't think the school was going to have a band. The former band director had left. We went to band, and there were only half a dozen people present. He introduced me to them, and we asked the students if they knew anybody who would like to play a certain instrument. And they did. We were trying to decide whether to dismiss the students and forget the whole thing, or go on.

Commitments had already been made for the band to march in football games. Norman said, "If we can possibly salvage the band, I'd like to." So we asked the members present to explain the situation to friends, saying that such and such an instrument was badly needed. It took about three weeks—too long—to get enough members to make a real band.

Our first performance was at a football game. (The game with BYU came later, but here I was the band director of the "enemy." I kept it secret where I was from until after we played BYU.)

Norman said, "I think I know a guy who could be a good drum major."

I went and talked to the fellow. He said, "Sure, I'd like to do that."

He'd done it before, so we were in business. I got the band and the drum major together. We had a few drills, and it looked like it was going to work out just fine. We only had about a week left till the performance, and one can imagine trying to schedule rehearsals for that many new people. The only time we could rehearse was at six o'clock in the morning and ten o'clock at night. That's what

we did. The lights in the stadium were turned on for us for our final night rehearsal.

We made uniforms from simply a dark pant and a white shirt. We marched in the game. It was a very humble looking band, but we had made the deadline.

From there, we did many concerts in the military installations in Hawaii, and we even combined with a couple of military bands, of which there were several in Hawaii. We went to the Church College of Hawaii, which at that time was just being built, the beginning of its second year, as I recall.

Things always work out. The principal oboist of the Honolulu Symphony had left, though I didn't know that when I arrived. So I called the director and said, "I'd surely love to play oboe in your orchestra."

He asked me some questions, then asked me to come and see him, which I did. I got the job. So I had a band, and I was principal oboist in the orchestra.

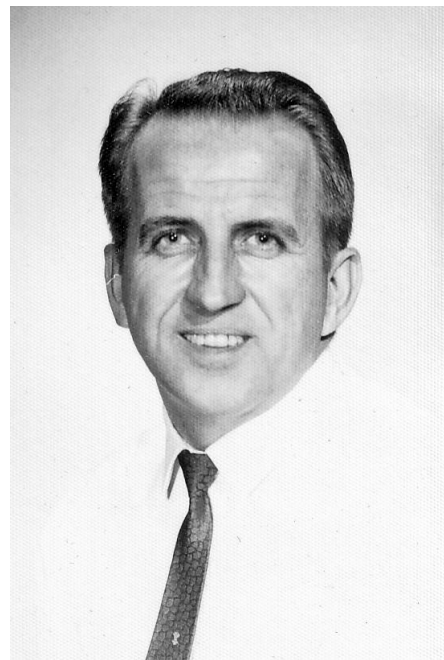
The year in Hawaii was an unforgettable experience, and I stayed there two years. I had a lot of fun. I hadn't done a lot of conducting, but enough to get by. I started studying conducting again. I'd taken conducting from a fine teacher at Indiana in my master's program.

After two years, I could see that if was going to continue to teach at the college level, I'd have to have a doctorate. That's when we went back to California, with the idea that after we got the doctorate, we might go back to Hawaii. I wasn't going to get caught without a job again.

After we came stateside, that arrangement didn't work out, so I resigned from the University of Hawaii. I decided to try USC. We had saved some money, about \$5,000, when we came from Hawaii to Los Angeles.

We had four kids by then, and it's hard to save money when you have kids. We decided to enroll at the University of Southern California. When we first arrived, there was an oboe teacher. When I met him, I realized that he played in the wrong school.

Let me back up again a little. Oboe playing has changed a great deal in the last fifty years. Louis Booth played with a very Frenchy oboe tone, a very bright and buzzy sound. In about 1950, a Frenchman by the name of Marcel Tabuteau revolutionized the oboe sound by scraping reeds entirely differently than they had been scraped before. The result was a darker, rounder sound. If you consider the partials in the overtone series in a sound, you emphasize the lower ones more than the upper ones, which was the exact opposite of what had previously been done.



I knew all of this, even before I went to Eastman School of Music. I wanted to study with someone who really knew it, because I had switched the way I made reeds and was going in that direction. But I needed, shall we say, the "finishing touches." I needed someone to tell me and teach me. I was

hoping to get that at USC. But the man who had been teaching oboe was of the old school, something I didn't know until afterwards.

To make a long story short, I was asked to be the oboe teacher. So I got an undergraduate degree where there was an oboe teacher, Robert Sprenkle. I had gone to Indiana and got a master's degree, and again, I was the teacher. Now I'm at USC and am going to repeat that arrangement. I'm getting a doctorate in oboe, and I had had only two years of instruction on oboe.

Though it was frustrating, I became the teacher, and I had several of the best students I've ever had. They were challenging even for me. But it was a good experience. The problem was that USC was primarily an academic school, not a performance school. So I had second thoughts about whether to go on to the degree, but I didn't have much choice, actually, at this point in my degree.

I decided to make a go of it. The \$5,000 didn't last very long. That was about the cost of tuition for one year at USC in those days; it was a high-priced school. The faculty tried to make a musicologist out of me—that was the big thing. The professor, a woman, Pauline Alderman, took a liking to me. "You are our oboe player," she told me, "but you'll be even a *better* oboe player when you understand more about the music you're playing." I guess you couldn't argue that logic, but it still wasn't what I wanted.

I stuck it out and had one of the worst years in my whole life. I don't know whether it's worth going in to or not, but the problem was that when we ran out of money (I was making a little money by teaching oboe, but not nearly enough), it became What do I do? I had to get a job, and maybe go to school part-time. I looked and asked around, and I checked the newspaper. Milk deliverymen were wanted at a dairy in Inglewood, California, a job that began at three o'clock in the morning. I

thought, *Well, if I can get to bed by ten o'clock. . .* (which I never did, because I also made money playing oboe, and so I never got to bed before midnight).

I tried the job for something like a year, maybe fourteen months—the worst fourteen months I ever spent. I was getting by on maybe three hours' sleep a night—or *trying* to get by. It wasn't working. I almost lost my life in an accident by going to sleep at the wheel of the delivery truck, by going through a red light in a five-street intersection. I missed by only inches, maybe six inches, a car that was going *very* fast. I was so shook up afterwards, I just pulled over and cried. I knew it would have been my fault, had there been an accident.

I told my wife that I had to quit that job, which I did.

I had taught a woodwind workshop at Indiana University, and it was the very class that was nor on my transcript to qualify me to teach school in California, so California was frustrating. I was told, "We'll give you the certificate as soon as you fulfill this *one* requirement." Wasn't that stupid? I told the people, "I've *taught* the class." I had also taught it in Hawaii.

I was told, "Well, we're sorry. We can't just take people for the job, because they're not all as honest as you are." That made me feel better.

So I went to a school district and tried to convince the officials that I would take the class, but I had to have a job in the meantime. I finally talked a district in to it and got a job teaching high school in Baldwin Park, California. I had a great experience there.

I became the orchestra director of a very fine orchestra, because eight or ten of the students took private lessons from two excellent teachers—a violin teacher who lived nearby

and played in all the studio orchestras; and a cello teacher, who did the same kind of thing. This orchestra was the best high school orchestra anywhere outside of Los Angeles. I enjoyed the orchestra very much and gave some good concerts. People heard me. When a director was chosen for the All-Southern California Junior High School Orchestra, the committee came to me. I got to conduct that very fine orchestra. I was used to a string orchestra of maybe twenty players, and now I had about two hundred players. It was also great experience.

It's interesting to me to look back and realize how very fortunate I was, considering what we had so foolishly done. I should never have resigned the job at Indiana. But I had thought, *I'm not going to fool around*, and we made the decision. Of course we wanted a job out west, and the only way you could find a job was to go out west. It was kind of a hard lesson.

I had a lot of experiences I can't forget. One of them was that I was elders quorum president in Pomona, California. We had moved out of Los Angeles when I taught at Baldwin Park. I scheduled my final doctoral oral exam in May 1960. Having been so busy, I told myself, *I will review for it for a whole month*. I guess the Lord wanted to try me, because he made me a bishop of the Pomona Second Ward, right at the beginning of that period. When you're a bishop, you have to organize a ward—there are some things a bishop just *has* to do.

So here I was, going to a final oral exam and feeling completely unprepared. I wasn't afraid of the written part of the final exam, but you never know what's going to be thrown at you orally. In sum, I did poorly in the oral exam, but on the basis of the written exam, I was told, "We're not going to kick you out; we're going to invite you to come back after you've had time to study."

That's what I did about a year later and got my degree. The people from BYU came down to help me play my final recital: Glenn and Barbara Williams, Harold Laycock, and a student, Richard Marsden, who had been in my Pomona Ward and played cello (whose father was a BYU graduate who taught in Pomona). I finally got the doctorate.

How long did you serve as a bishop?

I served six months in California as a bishop. I then got a letter from Crawford Gates, at BYU. Crawford and I had been together at Eastman, when he was getting his doctorate while I was working on my master's degree. So we were good buddies. He wrote and said, "Darrel, we need an oboe teacher and an oboe player." BYU didn't have any oboe players. That kind of scared me off, but I said to him, "Let me think about it." I finally decided that I might have a job one day playing first oboe in the Utah Symphony, because that's what Louie Booth had done. I was doing a lot of oboe playing in orchestras in the Los Angeles area, making some money—not a lot of money, but I was having lot of fun doing it. There were also plenty of teaching jobs in the area.

I had a hard time making the decision, but I finally decided to come back home. I'd been born and reared in Provo. I took the job at BYU. Interestingly, BYU didn't want to match my high school salary, and I had a hard time talking BYU into matching it. I finally said, "I don't think I can afford to come without that salary," so BYU finally decided to match the salary. (That's kind of a sad commentary on BYU.)

I think BYU got even after I came, maybe not giving me the amount of raise given to other teachers, but that may or may not be true.

Anyway, here I was, at Provo. I decided I wasn't even going to think about playing oboe except in the school orchestra, which needed

a first oboist. After one year, I was disappointed and discouraged. What BYU did, because there were no oboe students to teach, was to load me down with an academic teaching load. That made it impossible to have time to make reeds and to practice—to do all those things a good oboist has to do. My oboe playing went downhill. When that happens to a professional musician, it's a catastrophe. You're not happy at all.

I had made up my mind, prior to that, that I would not even think about the Utah Symphony. I decided to hang on for another year. And during that year—and this is an interesting story—Eugene Foster, the principal flutist in the Utah Symphony, was hired by BYU to teach flute and to play in our faculty woodwind quintet. We got together when he came down. Not long afterwards, he came to me and said, “Darrel, would you be interested in playing in the Utah Symphony?”

I said, “Would I!”

He continued: “I’m serious.”

I said, “But Eugene, it’s impossible.” Then I gave him all the reasons why. I’d known Louie all these years. Abravanel liked Louie’s playing, because Abravanel had conducted in France for years before he came to Utah. He *liked* that sound, even though it was almost out the door by now. Eugene said, “Well, you’re right. But it’s more than that.” He didn’t go in to detail.

I said, “That’s the end of it.”

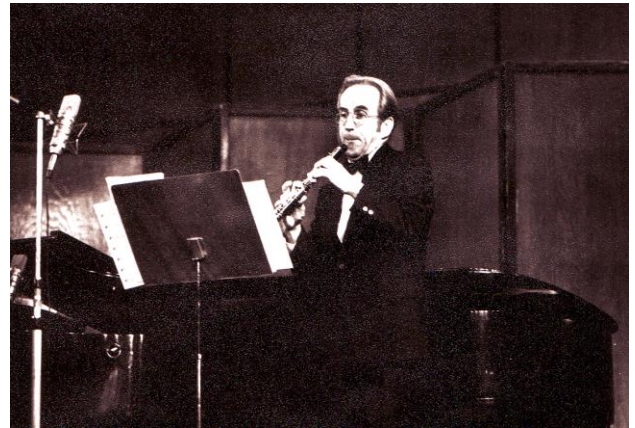
“No, it isn’t.”

“What are you talking about?”

He said, “If you’ll promise me that you really want that job, I’ll go back to the other principals—Martin Zwick on clarinet, Doug Craig on bassoon, and Eugene Foster on flute—and as three principles, we’re going to

talk to Abravanel. We’ll tell him that we need you.”

I told him, “I don’t know about that, but I’d be happy to take the job if it were offered me.”



That’s what those three principals did, and Abravanel was shocked. He didn’t respond favorably. They went back again and told him what *they* were going to do if he didn’t hire me. I don’t know the whole story—that’s as much of the story as I got.

Interestingly, Dick Ballou was the marching band director, and that fall, he was going to have a big marching band festival on BYU campus. The high school band directors asked him if he would ask me to play something for all the several thousand students, who had about half an hour to kill in their schedule, just after they ate.

I said, “Sure, I’ll do it.”

I asked Jolane Laycock, Ralph Laycock’s daughter, a fine pianist, if she would accompany me. We ran once through the arrangement for oboe and piano, and the Mozart oboe quartet. At about two o’clock in the afternoon of the day before the night we were supposed to play, Jolane became very ill, and I was about to cancel the performance. Then about three o’clock, Ralph called and

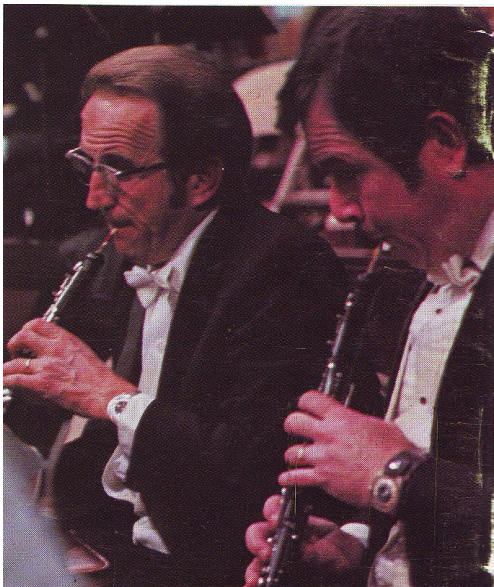
said, “Go on, Darrel. Jolane is starting to feel better.

She played, and I played, in the old field house—which is like a barn. I had no idea that Dick had asked Abravanel to be the music judge of the marching band festival, so Abravanel was there. (I’m sure it didn’t happen spontaneously, but I’ve given the background to the situation.) I was leaning over to put my oboe away when Abravanel came up and said, “Darrell, you play beautifully.”

I turned around, surprised, because I hadn’t known he was there. Then he asked me, “Could you possibly play in the Utah Symphony?”

I said to him, “I don’t know, Maestro, but I’ll be happy to find out. I would love to play in the symphony.”

That’s how the job offer came, and I ended up playing principle oboe in the Utah Symphony on a reduced contract, 3/5 load and salary.



I could make a religious story about that decision. I was so unhappy at BYU, I was

going to resign. I had been offered a job earlier at Sacramento State University. Eva’s mother didn’t know I wanted the job, and she had thrown away the letter that had offered me the job. (I won’t tell the whole story.)

I had decided to take the new job at Sacramento State. I broached the subject one Sunday afternoon around the dinner table. We had just come from Los Angeles two years before. The kids were teenagers by now, and they said, “Absolutely not! No way, Dad.”

Well, what would I do now? I took it to the Lord. Early one Saturday morning in February I took a hike up Rock Canyon, territory very familiar to me. For a long time, I had been asking the Lord if I could do this, and I hadn’t gotten an answer. Now I wanted an answer.

I was walking up the canyon, just before daylight, and there was still snow on the ground. At one point, the walls of the canyon are quite steep and rocky. I thought I heard the beginning of a little cracking sound, such as when snow pulls away. I looked up maybe sixty or seventy yards, and sure enough, a small snow avalanche was coming. I was on a trail, so I thought I’d see where it was coming and get out of the way. It looked like it was going to come behind me, so I went ahead. But it came right at me. Again, it wasn’t a big avalanche, but avalanches are scary. There are rocks and bushes in the snow.

It swept my feet right out from under me and threw me down in the gully that accompanies the trail in Rock Canyon. I was now scared, shaking and cold. I wasn’t hurt seriously, so I climbed out. I was standing there, cold and shaking, when the Lord answered my prayer. He told me that I must not go back to California. Furthermore, if I stayed, the first oboe job in the Utah Symphony would open up for me.

Prior to this time, knowing what I knew of the symphony situation, I could hardly believe

the Lord. I didn't ever think the job offer could happen. My message to everybody is therefore "Never, never distrust the Lord."

I stayed at BYU for twenty-eight years. BYU let me teach a three-fifths load, salary-wise, for thirteen years. If you want to retire from BYU full-time, you have to come back and teach ten years full-time. I did that.

I might explain some of the things I've tried to accomplish at BYU. As I grew up, there were only large ensembles—bands and orchestras. When I was back at Eastman, and even in the army, I learned that you don't learn all that much if you are, for example, a clarinetist, playing with twelve other clarinetists. A musician learns the most when he is playing one part all by himself, in relation with others who are doing the same thing. That is the best formula for learning how to play an instrument.

So when I came to BYU and saw how firmly entrenched the large ensembles were, I immediately asked myself what I could do about that, and I worked to that end.

When I finally qualified for a sabbatical, I knew exactly what I wanted to do: I wanted to visit the best music schools in America and find out what they were doing with regard to small ensembles—string quartets, woodwind quintets, brass quintets. And I learned a lot. I learned that I was right—that trend had begun sometime in the past, and it was being emphasized more and more. True, these schools had the symphony orchestra, but if the students' time is limited in what they do in the curriculum, then the orchestra would meet only two or three days a week, and the music majors would have to qualify in small-ensemble experience the other two days in the week. It was done on an hourly basis, but the curriculum was drawn up that way.

I brought back to BYU a lot of documentation, which I presented to Hal

Goodman, who was chairman at that time. We were good buddies, because I had played first oboe with him in the Utah Valley Symphony when I first came to BYU. He said to me, "Well, we have to do more of that." But change is hard to come by, when you become as ensconced as the department was at that time.

I decided to make a little more of an issue of it, so I wrote for a magazine an article concerning chamber music. The article was six or seven pages long, double-spaced, my idea being that students learn more and progress faster when the music in front of them is designed to be played on *their* instrument, in connection with other students doing the same thing—this with a good coach—all this being the second-best learning description. The first best learning experience, of course, is to play for a private teacher. Or maybe I should have said that the first experience is to practice, and then numbered the other experiences from there: practice, private teacher, small ensemble. That's a magic combination.

Solo literature is also important, but even that isn't as good as playing with a small ensemble, simply because in playing solo, you are your "own boss"; you can do what you want, and it doesn't make any difference in the total picture. But in the small ensemble, you have to match others, pitch-wise and dynamic-wise; you have to decide on the interpretation. All these things enter into one's learning process.

I don't remember the name of the publication I wrote the article for. The *Music Educator's Journal* got hold of it and wrote me: "Can we use the article?" Absolutely delighted, I replied, "Sure!" It became the featured article in the publication in about the fall of 1980. The editors changed my article a little, but not very much. (I'll try to find a copy to go with this interview.)

I did another thing which I thought was very worthwhile. I thought we could be set up at BYU very well if our small chamber groups could serve a double service: if they could play in public schools as well as on campus, especially if the members could be paid for their play. The only way that could be accomplished was to obtain a federal grant. By going through a special process, I learned how to write an application for such a grant, and I got it.

I had a program set up whereby a string quartet, a brass quintet, and a woodwind quintet would play in as many school districts as we could schedule. That plan was fraught with all kinds of problems. Setting it up looked beautiful on paper—scheduling these ensembles here and there, alternating at different times of the day and on different days of the week. We ironed all that out. We didn't realize that it wouldn't work. Five students in a quintet and four students in a quartet all had different school schedules. In short, that was our undoing.

I was overall chairman of chamber music at the time, as well as the woodwind coordinator. David Dalton was over strings, and Dan Bachelder was brass. We all thought we could make the plan work. I should have told these men that *they* were responsible for scheduling, but I didn't do that. At first I tried to do the whole thing.

Everybody was very happy and excited about it when we started. The most pleased people were the public school teachers. They thought this opportunity was something great. But then the brass quintet ran into real problems: they played a couple of concerts, and then they had to change one of their players. The new player announced, "I simply can't make such and such a date," and so the group didn't play a scheduled concert. The school principal called BYU. The grant was a matching-money grant, so BYU had to come up with half the money. The dean was happy to do that, but

then when other schools began calling, it became a real problem. Scott Boyer, the assistant dean over finances, took these calls and became excited. Jim Mason, the dean, called me in. I said, "Well, I goofed." I told him what I've just explained: I should have made Dan Bachelder responsible for scheduling. This problem happened two or three times, and that was too much, too late, to salvage the plan. So finally, I decided to discontinue the program.

The International Double Reed Society had just been on our campus. I had one of my students whom I'd taught at USC, David Weiss, call me: "Darrel, I'm going to be in Provo for the IDRS, and I'd like to come to your house and play a recital, in *your* honor." I was flabbergasted. I said, "Well, we'd love to have you play, but you've been honoring me all your life." He was one of the best oboists in the country. He had played principal oboe in four major symphonies, and so on.

When I had started teaching at USC, I got a call from another faculty member, who asked me, "Darrel, do you have room for one more student?"

I said, "Sure." I had only about four or five students at the time.

"I've got a student here that I can't handle. He's too good. He needs you."

"Well, send him up."

The next week, a woman with her son appeared in the door. She introduced herself and asked, "Do you mind if I take notes?"

"Heavens no," I said. That was the first time anyone had ever asked me that.

She wrote out everything I said to that boy, who was eleven or twelve years old at the time. He was an interesting kid. My thought was *He'll never settle down*. His mind was here and

there. When he sat down, he would tell me what was great about beachcombing last week, and all the good things he had found.

He played for me, and I realized that he wasn't breathing correctly, and breathing is fundamental on almost *anything* you do. So I said to him, "We're going to start from the beginning." I taught him some breathing exercises, which he thought was kind of stupid. I just told him, "You'll understand later why."

We also covered some other things. I'd frankly forgotten that his mother was writing down in shorthand everything I said, word for word. Then she took it home and transcribed it so that her son could read it. (That procedure is a valid verification of the value of what you are teaching. There's no chance that the student will misunderstand or not understand what you've said.)

I taught this student for three years before I came to BYU. The year I came back to BYU, in 1962, he played as a student performer with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. He later became their principal oboist. The last time I saw him, we made out an application for him to join the Music Academy of the West, where he's now the oboe teacher.

He is a fine player and a great kid, so I told him, "I'd love to have you play. I'll see if I can arrange an audience."

Many of my other students were on campus at the time, and I invited them up to my house in Midway (something we'd been doing anyway—we have two rooms in the corner of our house that make a nice miniature recital hall for chamber music concerts; and some of the BYU faculty have performed there).

The concert he played was written up. The way he tells the story is that everybody has a midlife crisis. When he arrived at his, he had to do something, so he learned to play the

musical saw. He is terrific—he's been on national television. The first time I heard him play was years ago on the *Johnny Carson Show*, and he's been playing ever since. So at his recital at our home, he played musical saw, oboe, and English horn. It was a fantastic concert.

We've heard many statements of accolade, from your sponsoring the Double Reed Society at BYU. Your name was at the top of the list among many people, especially because you were here and were able to participate. We commend you for coming. You are held in high esteem by many people, well loved and well respected.

You came back to BYU and taught. You had been a bishop for a while in California, and then you were made a bishop when you came back to Provo.

I've been a bishop three times. I think last calling was preceded by "Darrel, we're going to give you one more chance. Do it right this time."

You've had a life with many different facets. You've been a band teacher, a ukulele band teacher (laugher), an orchestra director, a member of army bands—many stories could be told. I know that you hinted, and I also know, that things of that nature are not coincidental. The Lord has had His hand in your life.

Very definitely.

Would you mind sharing with us your testimony?

When I took up the oboe in the tenth grade, after having played baritone, I was lucky enough to have a teacher who understood the role the oboe could play in great music. He chose, as one of the things to play, Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*. In rehearsing and

performing that symphony, I became completely convinced—in a difficult passage in the slow movement, where the oboe and the clarinet alternate each other, which has to be phrased just right, or it sounds bad or incomplete—that the Lord’s hand had to be in it. It was, in essence, sacred music. I’ve made an informal, lifetime study to prove that that statement is true. I left the Eastman School of Music in 1949. Many people knew that I was a Mormon and quite religious. One of them came up to me and said, “Darrel, there’s a book you ought to read. You’ll like it because it agrees with you.”

It turned out to be a book titled *Talks with Great Composers*, by Arthur Abell.

He continued: “I’ve read the book, and I think it’s in our library. You ought to go get it and read it.”

I never got the chance to read it then, but luckily, about ten years ago, I found the book and read it. It was the first thing I’d read in print which verified the fact that music does originate with the Lord. Arthur Abell, a fine pianist, came from Germany to New York City, where he was hired by a news agency to return to Berlin. When he went back, he met the most famous violinist of that time, Joseph Joachim, who was a good friend of Johannes Brahms. The three of them got together several times, and Abell would ask Brahms the question “How do you get your inspiration? Whence does it come?”

The violinist told Brahms that Abell really wanted to know the answer to the question. Brahms said, “Tell him to come to my house this weekend. I’ll answer his question.”

This gave Abell the time to find the most expert shorthand takers, in two languages, who could write down accurately every word that Brahms said. Brahms explained his answer in an absolutely wonderful way. He said he had to put himself in a certain state of

repose, which took time. At one point, he would begin to feel vibrations, which turned in to a vision. “I can *see* before me, not just *hear*, the music in scores—every note.”

That may sound preposterous, but Brahms was a very religious man. He had a great knowledge of the New Testament. Again, that was the first time I had seen in print what I knew to be true. I’ve followed and enlarged on that idea since. The Lord truly is the source of great music. I don’t think all musicians have that gift equally; there’s variety in their convictions. When you read Beethoven, you find the same thing: he claimed that he was closer to the Lord than anyone he knew. And he visited the Lord at times, or the Lord visited him, and when he visited with others, he would make statements like “If any man understands my music, he will go about the world free of the misery that others carry about with them.”

So music and that which is spiritual in our lives are closely and strongly connected. I bear that testimony.



Darrel and Eva